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CRITICAL HABITAT PROTECTION MEASURES AT POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE

The federally-listed threatened snowy plover nesting season is underway. Last year, the plovers at Point Reyes National Seashore had a successful nesting season due to intensive monitoring efforts. Efforts included the construction of "exclosures" around their inconspicuous nests immediately after an egg was laid. To assure this success continues this nesting season, the closure of a small stretch of the Point Reyes Beach to dogs will be initiated for the next nine days.

"This is the most critical time of the nesting season for these birds to have a chance of surviving. We have 12 chicks already fledged from the nests, and an additional 4 nesting pair that are sitting on at least a dozen more eggs," stated Superintendent Don Neubacher. He added, "We must do what we can to help this species survive over the long-term and this is one step we can take to reach this goal. We ask everyone's help in this effort."

Closing a small stretch of the 12-mile beach to dogs is mandatory to ensure no disturbance occurs during this critical time. The stretch of beach starting at ¼ mile north of the North Beach parking lot and continuing to a point ¼ mile south of the entrance near Abbotts Lagoon beach, will be closed to dogs from Friday, July 4 until Monday, July 14, 1997. This encompasses less than 3 miles of beach along this huge expanse. Other popular beaches such as South, Limantour, and Kehoe Beaches remain open as alternatives for park visitors with dogs.

Exclosures are triangular wire cages, 25 feet long on each side, erected to protect the plover eggs from their number one predator, ravens. These fenced-in areas have twine wound around the top to prevent the ravens from entering, but the plovers have easy access in and out of the wire mesh.

There are currently about 20,000 snowy plovers in the United States and approximately 90 percent are in the West. Most of the suitable habitat for these birds has been lost to development. As recently as 1987, over 70 nests were known to occur along some of Point Reyes' beaches. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that the snowy plover population had been on the decline since the 1970s, and listed the species as threatened in 1993. In 1995, only two chicks hatched from eggs at Point Reyes National Seashore, yet 20 nests were observed with two - three eggs in each of the nests. With the additional protection of the exclosures during the 1996 breeding season, nearly 18 chicks hatched! The number of chicks will double with the added protection of this temporary beach closure.

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